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# TOPONYMIC EDUCATION AND PRACTICE AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: TRAINING COURSES IN TOPONYMY

## Report on the toponymy course for southern Africa, held in Pretoria from 29 June to 9 July 1992

Paper submitted by the United Nations Group of
Experts on Geographical Names**

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1. UNGEGN members, together with the University of Pretoria and the Onomastic Research Centre (ORC), Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, organized a training course in toponomy for 45 participants from Southern Africa at the University of Pretoria in Pretoria, South Africa, from June 29 to July 9, 1992. Though the project to have a toponymy course in Africa south of the Sahara has been discussed frequently at UNGEGN meetings, this was the first time such a course really took off. The course provided a good programme, was well-attended and well-evaluated.

2. The two-week programme consisted of lectures, exercises and fieldwork, and this programme, which linked theory and practice, was organized on a module basis:

1. Names recording, storage and dissemination
2. Languages, scripts and names conversion
3. Standardization of geographical names
4. National names authorities
5. Collecting names in the field
6. Names placement on maps, toponymic guidelines
7. Toponymic research
8. Toponymic databases and GIS
9. Placenames in South Africa

Participants could register for single modules, but most of them attended the whole programme, which benefitted the continuity of the course.

The programme was more science-oriented than the UNGEGN courses that were held until now, with emphasis also on toponymic semantics, etymology and research. The results of some recently done research on Bible-derived placenames in South Africa were for the first time presented at this course (by Professors Hattingh and Kadmon).

3. The course was organized by a committee consisting of Prof.Dr.N.Kadmon, Prof.P.S.Hattingh of Pretoria University, Dr L.Möller and Dr P.E.Raper, both of the Onomastic Research Centre of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa. The local organisation was borne by the staff of the University of Pretoria Department of Geography.

The programme was mainly realized by UNGEGN members: Dr Raper (UNGEGN's Chairman), Ms H.Kerfoot (UNGEGN's Vice-Chair), Prof.Kadmon (Convenor of UNGEGN's Terminology Working Group) and Prof.Dr F.J.Ormeling (Convenor of UNGEGN Working Group on Applied Toponymy Courses). Together they presented 20 lectures. This lecture team was strengthened by local experts on terminology, coordinate systems, topographic mapping, street names, African languages, semantics, and toponymic research methods : altogether 30 lectures were presented.

4. All modules had exercises, most of which were organized by Prof.Kadmon. At the closing session of the course the participants were issued with certificates on the basis of their participation in the course.

5. The 45 course participants came from Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. Half the participants were native speakers of African languages. The participants came from i.a.:
- private cartographic firms (2)
- official (national) mapping establishments (2)
- geography university departments (7)
- African language university departments (10)
- English or Afrikaans university departments (2)
- government/university education departments (5)
- university History departments (1)
- municipalities (1)

6. It was the intention of the course fieldwork, held in the eastern part of the Transvaal province, on the Swaziland border, to get practical experience with data gathering techniques. This module will be followed up in 1993, when under the auspices of the UNGEGN and the ORC of the Human Sciences Research Council a special course on toponymic fieldwork techniques will be organized in the Northern Transvaal.

The hands-on experience with the handling of toponymical databases and geographical information systems proved to be at least as important as the fieldwork. The participants were able to experiment with the manipulation of a number of databases (on Khoekhoen languages and on names with water-related elements in them) that were specially created for this purpose. Every participant had a PC at his disposal for doing these exercises. Those that were not computer users were not turned into experts in these two weeks, but at least all participants got a good idea of the potential of these automated techniques.

All aspects of the names collecting, editing, analysis and representation activities were practised, e.g. exercises in analytical techniques, in representing the results of this research, map lettering exercises in order to show the kind of problems cartographers have to face when lettering the maps, especially with long names. There were also exercises in querying databases and mapping the results, in building subsets based on toponymic criteria, etc.

7. Of course it is too early to point to lasting effects of the course, but during the two weeks it was held, it became obvious that a tremendous amount of toponymic work has been done in Southern Africa and that there is a very active group of people engaged in this work.

As happened before in other toponymy courses (when toponomists meet for the first time under an international aegis) this apparently creates a conducive atmosphere. During the course two momentous decisions were made: one was the decision to establish a Southern African Geographical Names Dictionary unit - a multilingual and multicultural unit that would transcend the actual political and administrative subdivisions. The other, even more important, was to start a Southern African place name survey which would transcend present political boundaries.

8. The two weeks the course took were considered ample (as the weekend in-between was devoted to the fieldwork excursion module).

therefore the previous UNGEGN recommendation to have a three-week course was not considered necessary. Moreover, to take participants more than two weeks from their working environment poses too great an interruption to their jobs.

9. For the first time there was a significant input from the private sector, and this proved to be very worthwhile indeed. It made the other participants, civil servants and academics from universities or administration, realize the pressure UNGEGN is under to promote the production of national standardization, gazetteers, lists of exonyms and toponymical guidelines, as the private sector is eagerly awaiting those.

10. The formula to fly in a small number of experts, abreast of international trends and developments, to be strengthened by local experts, aware of local conditions and requirements, proved to be most useful, and the least expensive solution to be arranged at relatively short notice. This is a formula the International Cartographic Association has followed for two decades now.

11. The joint fieldwork proved to be a course element that provided a sort of team spirit. In a situation in which future cooperation between neighbouring countries is desirable, this is a desirable aspect to aim for.

12. Too little attention was paid in the lectures to the actual funding aspects of toponymic activities (such as the costs of toponymical fieldwork, the cost of the creation of digital names files, etc). In future courses these funding aspects should be covered as well.

13. Future UN toponymy courses should be advertised longer in advance, in order to allow potential participants and the UN enough time to organize the necessary funding. Potential participants from countries like Lesotho were unable to organize the funding of their travelling expenses. To address this problem, which is also an issue of concern to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the Chairman of UNGEGN proposes the establishment of an UNGEGN Fund to enable indigent experts to participate in UNGEGN activities. The fact that so many Southern African toponymists participated in the course is due to the enthusiasm of the organizers and the need for such training, as expressed unanimously by the participants.

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